

CHAPTER III.

THE REFORMATION—LUTHER AS REVOLUTIONIST.

THE Renaissance was, as we have seen, an emancipation movement. It liberated the intellect from the thralls of tradition. The Reformation was also an emancipation movement. It liberated the individual soul from the authority of pope and hierarchy, and brought it into immediate relation to God. It, too, was a crusade in favour of liberty as the age of the Reformation understood liberty. The Reformation age might not fully understand its own principle. It could hardly be expected to do so. It was difficult for men to rise to conceptions which only the future was to develop. It was impossible, considering the circumstances, to organise a great reactionary religious movement without defining a creed and requiring its acceptance. If Protestantism was to hold its own in the struggle with the old Church, it was bound thus to organise, and in order to organise it was bound to systematise. Unfortunately, it did not learn that organisation, systematisation, did not necessarily require the persecution of opponents, whether Catholic or non-Catholic. It forgot that Christianity leaves room for toleration, and in its forgetfulness it was not only untrue to Christianity, it was false to its own principle. The liberation of the individual soul which it championed was, after all, only relative. Relative to the past, it might be a mighty step forwards. Relative to the future, it was but the beginning of progress. This is, nevertheless, all that we can expect. We have no right, historically, to demand that a Luther or a Calvin should see things in the light that only the evolution of four centuries has enabled us to see them. We can only regret the fact that they did not.

Historically, then, we must look at the emancipation movement implied in the Reformation as what it was—a movement in favour of liberty in principle, if not unreservedly so in